

VZCZCXRO0348  
PP RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHROV RUEHSR  
DE RUEHLJ #0095/01 0471418  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 161418Z FEB 07  
FM AMEMBASSY LJUBLJANA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 5556  
RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO BRUSSELS BE PRIORITY  
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/JCS WASHDC  
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LJUBLJANA 000095

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

EUR/NCE FOR SSADLE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/16/2017

TAGS: [MOPS](#) [MCAP](#) [PREL](#) [PINS](#) [NATO](#) [SI](#)

SUBJECT: SLOVENIA WRESTLING ABOVE ITS WEIGHT CLASS IN NATO

Classified By: COM Thomas B. Robertson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[11.](#) (C) SUMMARY. Slovenia's commitment to NATO and to international security took a giant leap forward this week as the Slovenian Armed Forces began a six month, 600 troop deployment -- the largest overseas operation in the history of independent Slovenia -- to take over the Western Sector of KFOR in Kosovo. Those forces, operating for the first time with greatly reduced caveats, join Slovenian troops already deployed in Bosnia, Kosovo, Afghanistan, Lebanon, Iraq, and Sudan and make Slovenia the NATO ally with the largest percentage of its active duty troops deployed in support of NATO operations. That this evolving internationalist approach -- largely prompted by the personal actions of Prime Minister Janez Jansa since he took power in late 2004 -- is being observed by the public and the press without great criticism, represents a sea change in attitude for Slovenes and their understanding of Slovenia's role in promoting stability and security around the world. How Jansa channels, and improves upon, the cautious public support of his western-looking foreign policy will determine whether Slovenia will sustain itself as a small country wrestling above its weight class or one that will sink back to middle-of-the-pack obscurity. END SUMMARY.

- - - - -  
Exporting Security: Historic Firsts for the Slovenian Armed Forces Abroad  
- - - - -

[12.](#) (U) Slovenia is taking a giant leap forward this week, sending its largest number of troops ever -- 600 -- to Kosovo for six months. This major commitment comes in addition to other small but substantive deployments of Slovenian troops scattered around the world in Bosnia (62), Afghanistan (53), Lebanon (12), Iraq (4), Sudan (2), and on the Israeli/Syrian border (2). With the troops headed to Kosovo, Slovenia now has approximately 11% of its active duty forces deployed in support of NATO and UN operations abroad (the largest percentage in NATO), and is firmly cementing its commitment to NATO and to a more active role in promoting international security.

[13.](#) (U) Minister of Defense Karl Erjavec told the troops during a February 5 deployment ceremony attended by COM, DATT, ODC Chief, and BAO that the deployment represents "a new milestone in the development of the Slovenian Armed Forces," and in terms of size, responsibility, and expense he is correct. The deployment consists of 500 troops from Slovenia's 10th motorized battalion and an additional 100

troops from military police, veterinary, medical, logistics, and helicopter units. It will take over the Western Sector of KFOR, including the towns of Pec and Klina beginning March 1, and will be based out of the Italian military base "Camp Vilaggio Italia" in Pec until troops depart in August 2007. Though Slovenes have been participating in theater since January 2000, this will be the first time that Slovenia will control a geographic portion of an international operation (in this case Sector West of KFOR), the first time Slovenia will deploy an entire battalion, and the first time that Slovenia will command troops from another country (150 troops from neighboring Hungary). The cost of the mission is approximately Euro 7.1 million, and represents one quarter of the Slovenian Ministry of Defense's emergency operations budget for 2007.

-----  
Leadership Steps Up to the Plate and Eliminates Caveats  
-----

14. (U) Putting aside concerns about the security situation in Kosovo, Slovenian leaders have agreed to deploy their soldiers there without great restrictions, particularly in the case of responding to civil unrest (though MOD Erjavec stated that some caveats, which he did not name, will remain for the time being). The shift marks the first time that Slovenian troops have been deployed abroad without serious caveats. This occurred without an change in Slovenian law, something that was routinely cited by Chief of Defense Albin Gutman and MOD Erjavec in meetings with USG officials as a major roadblock to lifting caveats on Slovenian troops.

15. (U) Prime Minister Jansa, who previously told USG officials that Slovenes will eventually operate abroad

LJUBLJANA 00000095 002 OF 003

without caveats, had to defend the decision to the public, telling media outlets that "Slovenia respects the decision of the November summit of NATO and reduced national caveats," continuing that "it makes no sense to send a strong peacekeeping force to a hot spot and reduce its powers." He followed by saying that the government planned even fewer restrictions on troop activities in the future, but did not engage on where or when this would happen.

-----  
SAF Eager to Get to the Fight, Learn from the Deployment  
-----

16. (U) For SAF troops and commanders, this deployment is the culmination of years of training and months of planning. More importantly, it is a major test of how far the SAF has come in its transformation from a territorial defense force into a fully deployable national military force. The test started before troops set foot in theater with the logistical challenge of moving hundreds of troops and vehicles from Slovenia to Kosovo. PolMilOff and ODC Bilateral Affairs Officer visited the Port of Koper on February 14 where battalion leadership and logistics officers were supervising the loading of the nearly 200 vehicles that will accompany the battalion during its deployment. Major Robert Slak, the 10th Battalion's logistics chief, told EmbOffs that he is hoping to learn from the deployment and is already looking to fully utilize Slovenia's ACSA agreement with the United States while the SAF is deployed. The vehicles, escorted by approximately 10 troops, will travel to Greece via ship, then by rail to Kosovo, an option that was chosen to avoid any potential political problems associated with transporting troops and equipment through Serbia en route to Kosovo.

17. (U) As the ship was loaded, 10th Battalion Commander, Lt. Col. Miha Skerbinc-Barbo told EmbOffs that in terms of the forces now deployed to Kosovo, "we are the strongest," saying confidently that without caveats, the Slovenes are preparing to head into the action and potentially operate in harm's way if the security situation diminishes. MOD Erjavec told his

troops February 6 at the formal departure ceremony that "you will complete your mission with flying colors," and all eyes are on the 10th battalion and hoping for success.

- - - - -  
Media: "Vanished Caveats" Mean "it's Time for Real" for SAF  
- - - - -

18. (U) Major Slovenian dailies and television news called the departure of the battalion "historic," highlighting the "unparalleled responsibilities" on troops and pointing out the change in GOS policy on caveats. Regional daily "Vecer" warned that without caveats, SAF troops could find themselves between opposing sides and operating under a foreign commander, putting Slovenia into a camp with the U.S. and UK, as opposed to Germany, France, Italy, and other European countries that have the restrictions to keep their soldiers out of violent conflict without their knowledge. Another regional daily "Primorske Novice" noted that if violence like the kind seen in the western part of Kosovo several years ago -- when Italian troops did not respond to armed Albanians attacking a Serbian village -- occurred again, Slovenes would be expected to act. National daily "Dnevnik" focused on the policy shift away from caveats, pointing out that government officials previously said caveats against responding to civil unrest were a legal problem (with some experts claiming that removing caveats could potentially be unconstitutional), and alleging that the shift in policy makes previous government statements look like "a pretext...to avoid unpleasant assignments."

19. (C) COMMENT. In mid February, the average Slovene is generally talking about skiing conditions and the end-of-the-month school holiday, not the activities of the country's army and its soldiers. But with this deployment, Slovenian news headlines are shouting questions on caveats and people on the street are wondering about the safety of troops headed into a growing storm in Kosovo. That the conversation is more intellectual than political highlights the evolving internationalist attitude of Slovenian society, and Slovenes' understanding of their country's role in promoting stability and security. This change comes largely as a result of the personal involvement of PM Jansa, who was elected in 2004 with a markedly pro-U.S., pro-international

LJUBLJANA 00000095 003 OF 003

engagement platform. He has worked hard to shift attitudes in his country towards that approach. Following through on his longstanding promise to remove caveats shows that while the USG sometimes receives conflicting messages from Slovenia, Jansa remains committed to the trans-Atlantic agenda, though his path, and Slovenia's, might not always be the most direct.

110. (C) COMMENT CONTINUED. In a recent meeting with EmbOff, MFA Security Policy Department Director Stanislav Vidovic said that "South Eastern Europe is our neighborhood...and we believe that we need to take responsibility for making it secure." Indeed, EmbOffs hear at all levels of Slovenian government that the SAF's deployment is just that, a serious first effort by Slovenia to show what Slovenia is capable of, and to promote peace and stability in the region at the time when it is needed most. The 10th battalion's departure to Kosovo in tandem with planning for the upcoming EU Presidency reveal what may be the military and political coming of age for Slovenia. How Prime Minister Jansa channels, and improves upon, the cautious public support of his western-looking foreign policy will determine whether Slovenia will solidify itself as a small country punching above its weight class or one that returns to middle-of-the-pack obscurity. END COMMENT.  
ROBERTSON